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NOTES FROM THE WEATHER BUREAU LIBRARY.

By C. FITZHUGH TALMAN, Professor in charge of Library.

[Dated, Washington, Mar. 1, 1915.]

INDIAN SUMMER.

In nearly everything that has heretofore been written concerning the expression "Indian summer" it is taken for granted that the term "Indian" used in this connection has reference to the North American Indians. In his memoir published in the MONTHLY WEATHER REVIEW of January and February, 1902, Mr. Albert Matthews quotes some letters of Horace Walpole in which certain unusually hot summers in India are described as "Indian," obviously in allusion to the hot climate of India, or possibly the "Indies" in general; but these quotations probably have no bearing on the history of the term "Indian summer" as now commonly used in America. Somewhat more pertinent is the suggestion of Prof. Abbe¹ that "some early traveler who had been in India and had experienced the dry, hazy weather of the dusty Indian plains recognized the same kind of sky in our Indian summer haze."

Mr. Horace Ware, of Boston, has recently called the writer's attention to the fact that the term "Indian summer" is applied in the British Board of Trade regulations to the season of fine weather over the waters adjacent to British India, and that the abbreviation "I. S.," meaning Indian summer, is used in marking one of the maximum load lines on British ships. The regulations under the merchant shipping act of 1894, adopted January 12, 1899, contain the following provisions as to marking load lines:²

3. Such maximum load lines shall be as follows, and the upper edge of such lines shall respectively indicate:

For fresh water: The maximum depth to which the vessel can be loaded in fresh water.

For Indian summer: The maximum depth to which the vessel can be loaded for voyages during the fine season in the Indian seas, between the limits of Suez and Singapore.

For summer: The maximum depth to which the vessel can be loaded for voyages (other than Indian summer voyages) from European and Mediterranean ports between the months of April and September, both inclusive, and as to voyages in other parts of the world (other than Indian summer voyages) the maximum depth to which the vessel can be loaded during the corresponding or recognized summer months.

For winter: The maximum depth to which the vessel can be loaded for voyages (other than Indian summer voyages and summer voyages) from European and Mediterranean ports between the months of October and March, both inclusive, and as to voyages in other parts of the world the maximum depth to which the vessel can be loaded during the corresponding or recognized winter months.

For winter (North Atlantic): The maximum depth to which the vessel can be loaded for voyages to or from the Mediterranean or any European port, from or to ports in British North America or eastern ports in the United States, north of Cape Hatteras, between the months of October and March, both inclusive.

¹ MONTHLY WEATHER REVIEW, Feb., 1902, 30: 73, footnote 142.

² Robt. Temperley. "The Merchant Shipping Acts." London, 1907, pp. 710-711.

Such maximum load lines shall be distinguished by initial letters conspicuously marked opposite such horizontal lines as aforesaid, such initial letters being as follows:

F. W.—Fresh water.

I. S.—Indian summer.

S.—Summer.

W.—Winter.

W. N. A.—Winter, North Atlantic.

The season of fine weather in the Indian seas (i. e., the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and adjacent waters) is the period from November to March, inclusive, when the northeast monsoon prevails, or more especially the months January–March, inclusive, when these seas are entirely free from tropical cyclones. Astronomically, this season is “winter” rather than “summer.” It is, however, the dry season, and it is not uncommon in tropical countries to identify the dry season with summer and the rainy season with winter. This custom is especially common

in Spanish-speaking tropical countries, where the dry season is commonly called “verano” (summer) and the wet season “invierno” (winter), regardless of the ordinary calendar. However, the present writer is not familiar with this use of the terms “summer” and “winter” in literature relating to or emanating from India. Certainly the “winter” of guidebook and travel literature concerning India is the cold season, i. e., January and February.

We should be glad to obtain information as to the history of the term “Indian summer” as applied by British sailors to the season of fine weather in the Indian seas, and also as to the limits of the season thus designated. If the term was current in this sense as early as the eighteenth century, the fact may have some bearing upon the history of the term in its more familiar application to a spell of fine, tranquil weather in autumn, though this does not, at present, seem likely.